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CC:
Subject: Fw: FYI - Inside EPA: Activists Criticize EPA Dimock Data

FYI

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Subject: FYI - Inside EPA: Activists Criticize EPA Dimock Data

Activists Criticize EPA Dimock Data

Posted: April 6, 2012

EPA's latest round of sampling of residential drinking water supplies in Dimock Township, PA -- where natural gas drilling is suspected to have contaminated water -- shows levels of pollutants do not appear to pose immediate health hazards, prompting criticisms from activists who say the agency's response undercuts the risks from explosions due to high levels of methane in the water.

The new data, released by EPA Region III April 6, supports statements EPA made in 2011 that the Dimock contamination from gas drilling was not at levels likely to be hazardous, but could also undermine the agency's efforts to use its Superfund authority to address oil and gas contamination.

"This set of sampling did not show levels of contaminants that would give EPA reason to take immediate action," an EPA spokesman said in a statement on the new data.

The data could bolster a push by Cabot Oil and Gas Corporation, whose drilling activities the agency has suggested may be to blame for the contamination, to challenge EPA's ability to conduct its investigation under Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation & Liability Act authority, which it is increasingly doing to target oil and gas operations.

Cabot and other industry officials have challenged EPA's use of Superfund authority to investigate Dimock, saying that EPA's Jan. 19 memo citing its authority hinges on hazardous levels of several contaminants, including inorganic arsenic, being found in the Dimock water.

Activists are already criticizing the agency's approach in Dimock, saying that EPA should have completed and released all of its data prior to making any statements about the safety of the water, as it did in a similar study in Pavillion, WY, and arguing that the statements don't take into account the possibility that levels of methane in the water could cause explosions.

"While EPA maintains that methane contaminated water is safe to drink, at high enough concentrations it can cause explosion or asphyxiation," Kate Sinding, of Natural Resources Defense Council, said in a March 19 blog post.

Sinding notes that EPA issued its recently dropped emergency order to Range Resources based on methane contamination. "This begs the question why EPA Region III has glossed over methane contamination in Dimock where, in the past, residents have been able to light their water on fire."

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